

# *Abergavenny Local History Society*



*St. John's, Abergavenny*

NEWSLETTER No 12  
August 1996

SUMMER VISITS 1995

It was a long journey to St. David's for our first visit, but we had good weather. We found St David's being spruced up ready for a visit by Her Majesty the Queen a few days later. We enjoyed excellent guided tours both of the 12th century Cathedral and the ruins of the Bishop's Palace.

The first stop on our three day visit to Bury St Edmunds was at Tickencote which is just outside Stamford. We were taken round a lovely Norman church which had a splendid large chancel arch. Being inside the church it was in very good condition with all its six rows of carvings looking almost new.

After lunch we went on to Oxburgh Hall, a moated house built in 1482 with a magnificent Tudor gatehouse. Inside, items of embroidery worked by Mary Queen of Scots during her captivity were on display.

Lavenham, a medieval picture village was our first stop next day. As well as visiting the Priory we looked at the local church, considered to be the finest of the many 'wool' churches built in East Anglia on the wealth of the medieval wool trade. Before leaving we also visited the early 16th century timber framed Tudor Guildhall with its display of local history.

After lunch we travelled on to Framlingham only a few miles from the sea where it was bitterly cold. The castle was built at the end of the 12th century and comprises thirteen towers with linking outer walls. Nearby the local church which was being decorated for a Flower Festival contained some splendid tombs of the Howard family. In 1483 John Howard was created Duke of Norfolk. Framlingham castle was the major seat of the Dukes of Norfolk until the 4th Duke married Mary Fitzalan in 1555 after which Framlingham gave way to Arundel as the seat of the Dukes of Norfolk.

Our last day began at Hadstock with its outstanding Anglo Saxon church and finished at Audley End a Jacobean mansion. It was originally built by Thomas Howard Earl of Suffolk as a place grand enough to entertain the King. James I, however, although invited, never accepted the invitation.

Our last full day visit took us to two very different but very interesting houses. At Chavenage the owner described the history of this Elizabethan house built in 1576. At Kelmscott Manor built around 1570 we learned of it being the house of William Morris the writer, artist, craftsman and manufacturer from 1871 until his death in 1896. The house was full of his work.

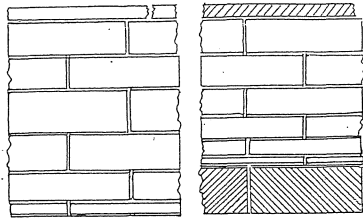
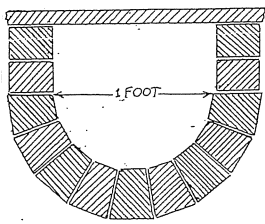
The Curator of Monmouth Museum Andrew Helme took some of us on a walk around Monmouth, starting at the castle and finishing at the 13th century fortified gatehouse over the river.

Our last visit was to Llantony Secunda Manor in Caldicot. This ancient four storey building is believed to be the oldest continually inhabited house in Wales. In 1135 the Priory of Llantony Secunda was formed to receive monks from Llantony Prima in Wales where they were being oppressed by locals from the Brecon Beacons. These monks built the first manor house, part of the building we visited.

Alan Spink

### THE CHAPEL ROAD CULVERT

This hand made brick culvert described in detail in the 1990 newsletter is said to have fed the fountains in Nevill Hall.



The excavations for water mains have enabled me to trace it from Western Road down as far as No 9 Chapel Road near the now demolished railway bridge. Unfortunately, the excavations remained open for a very short time and I missed the place where it might have crossed the Brecon Road.

The workmen reported a similar culvert at the junction of Mount Street and Orchard Street but I missed it. There has been a lot of disturbance over the years so it is necessary to identify the particular kind of brick to establish the culvert's presence.

Ken Key.

### THE WHITE SWAN (4 Cross Street)

A deed of settlement in the County Record Office dated 18 June 1766 records "John Jones of the White Swan in the town of Abergavenny, Victualler". Another C.R.O. document of April 20th. 1779 names "John Jones of the town of Abergavenny, corvicer" as the eldest son and heir of "John Jones late of the Whiteswan in Abergavenny, dec'd". In 1788, the licensee is named as a Mrs Jones. On September 8th 1794, a Society of Tradesmen and Gentlemen Farmers was formed who met here. The gutter heads of the current building bear the date 1835. In that year the pub is listed as the Old Swan in Mill Street (as the bottom part of Cross Street was then known).

From 1842 till his death in 1854, the place was run as a wine merchant's shop by John Powell Williams. He was followed by Anne Sybil Williams ("Agent for Irish Porter and dealer in hops"). She was probably John Williams' widow and ran the business from 1858 to 1860.

Between 1864 and 1891 the house was owned by Samuel Henry Facey and Co. Ltd., first as a retail outlet for his wine and spirit importing business and later for his brewery in Market Street. A receipt of about 1878 describes Mr Facey as an "Importer of Foreign Wines and Spirits, Brewer and Maltster, Agent for Burton Ales and Dublin Stout". They also used the cellars under the Town Hall as a bonded stores from about 1873 on. Mr Facey is recorded as living on the premises until 1880 when he built 'The Elms' in Belmont Road as the family home.

In 1901, the place is again referred to as the White Swan. Sometime between 1906 and 1910 the pub became known as the Eureka Hotel. When Mrs Rosa Denner took over as publican from Eustace Baker in February 1913, the house reverted to its traditional name.

In more recent times the pub was often referred to as "The Dirty Duck". It finally closed in 1972.

Publicans: John Jones (1766-1779), Mrs Jones (1788), Margaret Jones (1791), A. Fox (1822-1823), George Carver (1830), James Chamberlain (1835), John Goodwyn (1839), John Powell Williams (1842-died 1854), Anne Sybil Williams (1858-1860), Samuel Henry Facey & Co. Ltd. (1864-1891), William Denner (1901), Thomas George Alden (1905-1906), Daniel Holding (1910), Eustace Baker (Feb. 1912-Jan. 1913), Mrs Rosa Denner (Feb. 1913-1934), L.E. Boatman (Nov. 1934-Jan. 1935), Horace Jones (1937).

Frank Diding

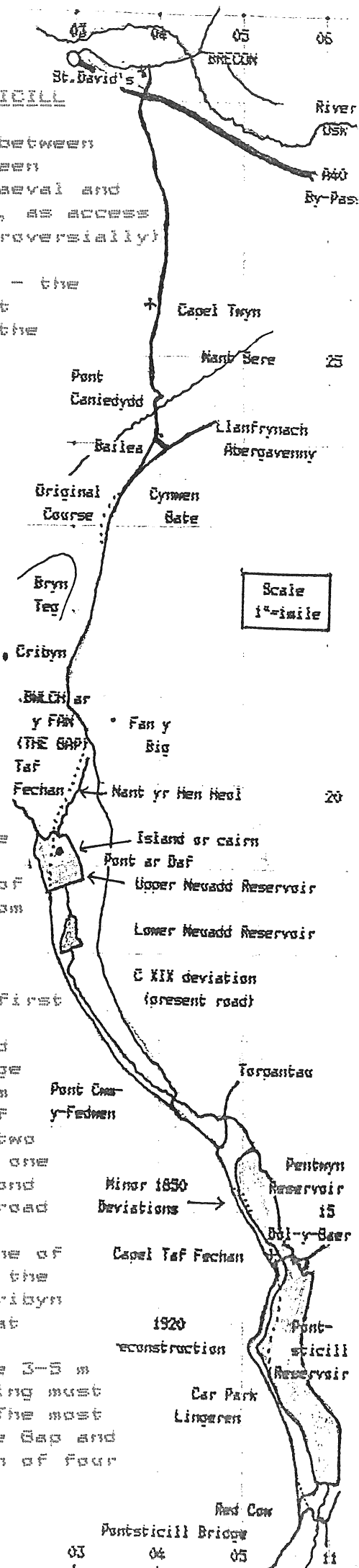
# THE GAP ROAD-BRECON-PONTSTICILL

The Gap Road, or Miner's Track, is an old route between Brecon and the Taff Fechan valley. Its age has been variously estimated as Neolithic, Roman and Mediaeval and it remains in use as a walking and cycling trail, as access to mountain grazing for local farmers and, (controversially) for 4-wheel drive enthusiasts.

One view is that the route is of pre-Roman date - the Barn Hir (long paved way). The discovery of flint implements, close to the route at the cairn on the 'Island' in the Upper Neuadd Reservoir, lends support to this. (Martin 1995). Margery (1967) considered the road as of 'certain Roman age' - but this does not preclude the Roman adoption of an earlier route. The absence of agger construction and the fact that the road does not line up on a Roman site but on another road (that from Abergavenny to the Brecon Beer) are of little importance. In hilly terrain Roman roads are often terraced and take convenient winding routes if conditions make straight lines difficult. However, the Ordnance Survey does not show the road on its map of Roman Britain (1991) nor on current Landranger or Pathfinder series despite indicating its Roman status on the 1" series.

Alternative or perhaps additional ancient and Roman routes through the Beacons have been proposed linking the known road from Gelligaer to Pandydarren with the Brecon Beer. Regarding Mediaeval use, there is evidence that the route was used by Edward I in 1295 when suppressing the Marcher Lords and that it appears in other Royal itineraries. The first definitive mapping is that of John Ogilby (1675) with interesting deviations from the present line which also appear on the first edition OS maps of the 1830's.

The road leaves Brecon at St David's church (03032283) and has a tarmacadam surface for the first 5 km, passing over the A40 Brecon by-pass, past Capel Twyn, crossing Nant Sere (erroneously named Tavy Flu by Ogilby) via Pont Canedydd (the bridge of the singer) to a point just beyond Baileia Farm (039246). Ogilby shows the farmhouse, which is of CXIV origin and still stands. He also indicates two roads north eastwards which can still be traced, one a farm track and the other a bridleway. Just beyond the mountain gate at Cynwyn (037235) the present road follows the line of a stone wall, but small embankments suggest an earlier course up the spine of Bryn Teg for some 300-400 m before converging on the present road. It continues in a wide arc below Cribyn to pass through Swich-ar y Fan (The Gap 032206) at 599m altitude (1966 ft.) Again, there is strong evidence of an earlier and steeper alignment some 3-5 m above the present road. Extensive CXIX earth moving must have occurred to deepen the Gap to this extent. The most significant changes in alignment are south of the Gap and are associated with the construction of the chain of four reservoirs along the Taff Fechan. The first two, now known as Pentwyn (opened in 1858 as Dolygaer Lake) and Lower Neuadd (1884) required only minor



deviations to the old road which would not have been inundated but would lie close to the reservoir shores. The plans for Upper Neuadd (opened 1902) show the old road which was to be flooded as already discussed. In fact, by 1885 the new road above the eastern side of the Taf Fechan was already built (1st ed. OS 6" series) but the waterworks plans make no mention of it. The original course of Ogilby's road lay through the middle of Upper Neuadd with two crossings of the Taf Fechan, one a ford and (presumably later) the Pont ar Daf (027192) close by. The route from the Gap to Pont ar Daf lay on the western bank of a stream significantly named Nant yr Hen Heol (Stream of the Old Road). From the bridge or ford, passing close to the cairns where flints were found, the road continued to the western end of Upper Neuadd Reservoir, skirting the side of Lower Neuadd and on down the valley. From Lower Neuadd it can be followed as a footpath, and for the final km it is in use as a forestry track. It joins the present tarmac road at 044162 and the whole route (excepting the inundated section much of which was exposed in August 1995) can be walked. It provides interesting relics by way of cuttings, embankments, culverts, ditches etc. The final diversion was necessitated by the construction of the largest reservoir, Pontticill (1927). Instead of turning right at 055143 to follow the edge of the reservoir, the old road continued straight on to join a now submerged junction with the road from Dolygaer. The line then turned generally southward and its convergence to the present tarmac road can be seen just north of the car park near Llyngeren (054129). One final difference lies in the descent to Pontticill Bridge at 057117. 100m north of the Red Cow inn the old course can be seen dropping away by a stone wall crossing the road to Pontticill dam and rejoining the final descent by Pen-yr-Heol Cottage (another significant name) to enter Glamorgan at Pontticill Bridge (059115), twelve difficult miles from Brecon Margery, I.H. (1957) Roman Roads in Britain. Vol II. Martin, Karl (1995) Private communication. Ogilby John (1675) Britannia.

Derak Bissell

#### RESTORATION OF THE ST MARY'S MONUMENTS

We are grateful for the skill of Kate Woodgate-Jones for the restoration of the Queen Anne arms of 1709 and the hatchment of Pritchard of Grosmont. Mike Eastham and his team have restored the effigy of John de Hastings (1326, formerly known with affection as 'George') which now stands on its original tomb case which had been used as the Hastings chapel altar front. This product of the 'Westminster' school is probably the finest piece of mediaeval wooden sculpture in Europe. The Jesse Tree, probably part of the



altar reredos, now reveals traces of its original colour and stands on a new oak plinth. These are on display in the church but behind the polythene Judge Powell (1638) and his wife Margaret Herbert, although with the alabaster partly washed away by the leaking roof, are clean and on a new plain case. Laurence (1348) the last of the Hastings on his matching limestone case is finished. William ap Thomas (1445) is in position and his wife Gwladys is about to join him. Work progresses on the Baker tomb. 'Sir' Richard Herbert of 'Ewyas' delighted everyone by the beardsman at his foot which has not been seen for 300 years and will disappear when the effigy returns to its niche. Modern technology in the form of a laser has been used with great success to burn off pollution from the alabaster.

There is hope that the Herbert chapel will be open by the end of the year. Work will then start on the Lewis tomb.

Ken Key (with help from Gwyn Jones)

LECTURE PROGRAMME 1996-97

meetings are at the Borough Theatre at 7.30. p.m.

1996

- 26 Sept. Mr Richard Keene THE HORRID AND THE SUBLIME  
Landscapes of South Wales
- 24 Oct. Mr John Van Laun LOST SITES OF WALES' INDUSTRIAL PAST
- 28 Nov. Mr Andrew Helme MONMOUTH TOWN AND COUNTRYSIDE  
THROUGH THE EYES OF LOCAL ARTISTS
- 19 Dec. MEMBERS' CHRISTMAS DINNER AND SOCIAL EVENING  
at the Lamb and Flag Hotel at 7.00 for 7.30 p.m.

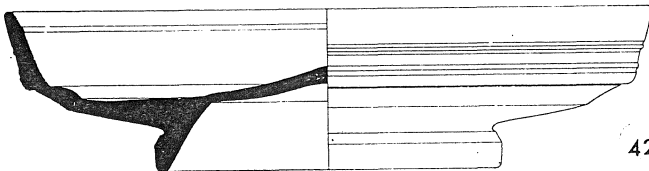
1997

- 16 Jan. Mr Allan Cook SHIPPING IN THE BRISTOL CHANNEL 1750-1916
- 27 Feb. Mr Frank Olding MEDIAEVAL CHURCHES IN NORTH GWENT
- 27 Mar. Mr Arthur Peglow CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL AND THOMAS A BECKET
- 24 April. Mr Brian Davies EARLIEST HISTORY OF GLAMORGAN AND GWENT
- 22 May. 20th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by  
Mr William Gascoigne THE CAVES OF LLANBATTOK

Member's subscriptions are due after the A.G.M.

THE SOUTH GAULISH POTTERY OF LA GRAUFENESQUE

During my camping, touring and canoeing holiday last year in the dramatic gorges of the Tarn and Ardeche in France, I got lost in Millau and ended up at the confluence of the Tarn and Dourbie rivers.



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DEMODES

In this very place was made much of the red Roman Samian pottery which I dug up in Castle Street. Modestus was one of the potters.

The clay occurs in the Jurassic grey marl on the lower slopes of the Causse de Larzac, a high plain to the south east. It settled in water in wooden tubs and the fine clay went via canals and the river Dourbie to the site. It was stored and kept damp in covered ponds.

The potters moulded the pots rather than turning them and some 200 of the decorated moulds are on site and in the museum in Millau.

The furnace fired some 10000-40000 pots at a time to 1050 degrees Celsius for three or four days. It took 60 cubic metres of wood and the flames were canalised inside the kiln so that they did not touch and oxidize the pots. Even so, thousands of wasters or reject pots were found in the surrounding ditches.

This industrial site provided modest houses for the workers, a temple for worship and a bath house with a hypocaust.

A model of the kiln is in the museum and the curator was most helpful. Much of the base of the kiln is still standing after nearly 2000 years.

I was so lucky to stumble over it! The guide books didn't even mention it.

Ken Key.

